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The Evaluation of Teacher Effectiveness

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Abstract

Literature on teacher effectiveness is presented to illustrate major problems and emerging trends. Conclusions suggest that the most fruitful work in this area will be done within a framework of sophisticated theory regarding instructional processes, coupled with technological tools for studying samples of teaching transactions.

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The purpose of this report is to provide some idea of the scope of the work on teacher effectiveness, the general findings, the major problems, and the emerging trends. Bibliographies and summaries of the literature have been prepared by Domas and Tiedeman (1950), Remmers (1952, 1953), Watters (1954), Mitzel and Gross (1956), Mitzel (1960), Ryans (1960), and Barr (1948, 1955, 1961). To these may be added the two classic volumes edited by Sanford (1962) and Gage (1963). The most recent effort to probe the research on teacher effectiveness is reported by Biddle and Ellena (1964). Their conclusion is a variation on a theme which has become disturbingly familiar to those following the countless studies on teacher effectiveness: "...with all this research activity, results have been modest and often contradictory. Few, if any, facts are now deemed established about teacher effectiveness, and many former 'findings' have been repudiated. It is not an exaggeration to say that we do not today know how to select, train for, encourage, or evaluate teacher effectiveness." Such is the state of the art.

Considering the present state of the art, the temptation is large for becoming a prophet of doom crying out against further efforts to undertake so fruitless a task as teacher evaluation. An alternative behavior is available to us. This is to ask what it is in our <u>modus operandi</u> which consistently leads to conclusions which every teacher

intuitively senses as incomplete. Most of us feel with Harold Carter (1965) that "any teacher who chooses to make a difference will make one." What is it in our research approach that consistently fails to detect what in all probability exists: a stable and reliable difference in quality of teaching. Is it possible by retracing some of the work in teacher effectiveness and listening with sharpened hearing to the comments, often offered parenthetically, of the investigators that we may formulate fresh approaches to unexplored research avenues.

Tomlinson (1955a, 1955b) has sketched some of the prominent features in the history of research on teacher effectiveness. According to Tomlinson, the first recorded studies were based on collections of opinions about teachers. In 1896, Kratz interviewed 2,411 public school students by questionnaire and found that the most frequently mentioned characteristics used to define good teachers were "helpful in studies","personal appearance", "good and kind", "patient", "polite" and "neat." Early efforts were concerned with collection and organization of opinions as to qualities of successful teachers and causes of failure. In the decade from 1910 to 1920 attempts to perfect rating scales and other observational devices seem to have dominated the activity. In the mid 20's, measures of pupil change became a frequent index of teacher effectiveness. The 1920's and 30's saw a number of studies attempting to relate intelligence, grades, attitudes and professional knowledge to teaching effectiveness as determined by ratings. Barr's summary of some 75 dissertations completed at Wisconsin between approximately 1930 and 1960 reveals a continuation of these earlier trends with general improvement in data gathering instruments,

research designs and analytical procedures. While some intriguing findings are included in these studies (teachers with a high degree of interaction with their students were rated by these students as good instructors but these evaluations correlated near zero with administrator's ratings), one of the major contributions growing out of Barr's continuing and thoughtful engagement with the problem has been a clearer definition of the sub-problems which must be solved and the difficulties inherent at each step:

> "One of the problems that needs clarification, possibly before all others, is that of the criterion of teacher effectiveness. This problem is complex with many sub-issues. ... Second, any theory of teacher effectiveness to be tested, involves data-gathering devices. Operationally, concepts of human abilities are no better than the instrument that one employs in identifying them. ..."

Impinging on this problem of defining teaching, identifying criteria and constructing instruments are a whole host of conflicting observations, hunches, assumptions, and theories. Among these are the facts that teachers work on different levels with different subject matters and perform different tasks. Their behavior is viewed by individuals with different expectancies (administrators, supervisors, peers, parents, pupils, and educational researchers). Instruments embody limited aspects of student growth, teacher activity, or segments of existing educational theory. Finally, there is a growing feeling that teaching acts are not good or bad in general, but in relation to specific conditions,

purposes, pupils and the particular classroom dynamics. Clearly, the conceptualization of teaching-learning acts and the methodologies employed to bring it under scrutiny must be adequate to handle the complex, many factored, dynamic phenomena under study.

It is precisely in these areas of instructional theory and corresponding instrumentation that the work on teacher effectiveness has bogged down. Researchers have tended to work with fragmented elements of teaching behavior rather than with a model process. Instruments have tended toward collections of post hoc memories by students and supervisors, rather than with time samples of behavior in context.

While it is impossible at this stage to speak of emerging trends, there is certainly within the current zeitgeist a growing concern for building models of the instructional process and a shift from ratings of traits by untrained observers to systematic recordings, either by trained recorders or video tape, of total class room interactions (Ryans, 1960). Yildirim (1965) suggests that evaluation becomes a matter of the degree of correspondence between the behavior observed and that required by the model.

Educational researchers have been hesitant to formulate teaching models which may be prematurely prescriptive. Yet, as Wallen and Travers (1963) point out, even in those situations defined strictly in terms of observables, such observables are themselves abstractions representing judgments to describe some behaviors while ignoring others. Questions of value judgments underlying teaching objectives are inescapable, and perhaps the initial task is to hammer them out anew in the arena of public and professional discourse. Given agreement on

objectives, we can then begin a systematic study of the conditions and behaviors which maximize the likelihood of their attainment. We have a wider range of psychological and instructional theory to draw on than did our predecessors. We have technology which permits us to capture and hold for repeated study samples of teaching transactions. Can we use these new tools of theoretical and empirical analysis to replace the search for correlations between teacher traits and observer ratings which have characterized past studies? Can we view teaching behavior as one component in an instructional system performing first one function, then another, as a particular kind of learning sequence unfolds (Ryans, 1963)? Can our instructional theory eventually culminate in conceptual models useful in evaluating teaching behavior? What institutions, groups, or individuals are committed to these tasks?

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